

Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University

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Source: *Transition*, No. 118, I Can Be Lightning (2015), pp. 15-31

Published by: Indiana University Press on behalf of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/transition.118.15>

Accessed: 26-08-2016 22:18 UTC

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Afro-Dog

Bénédicte Boisseron

THE DEPARTMENT OF Justice's 2015 investigation of the Ferguson Police Department uncovered a connection between race and the repressive use of police dogs in the city of Ferguson, Missouri. As the report stated, "in every canine bite incident for which racial information is available, the subject was African American." Dogs, though supposedly color-blind, work on cues and, in the case of the Ferguson police, seem to have been trained to direct their aggression towards the black population. While police dogs were used during the 2014 protests that followed the death of African American teen Michael Brown in Ferguson, their absence during the 2015 Baltimore riots was noted by politician Hyland "Buddy" Fowler, Jr. who suggested (via social media) that attack dogs should be launched against those who took to the streets after the death of African American Freddie Gray. Fowler's comment prompts the question of the extent to which the association between canine aggression and black civil disobedience is still very much ingrained in the fabric of our society. The post-Ferguson era has brought back to consciousness a racial prism that many wished dead in the so-called Obama "post-racial" America, a prism in which race and dogs insidiously intersect in tales of violence.

Donna Haraway opens her book *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003) with the following tribute to her Australian sheepdog named Ms. Cayenne Pepper:

Ms. Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells—a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis. I bet if you checked our DNA, you'd find some potent transfections between us. Her saliva must have the viral vectors. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible.

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), relating to species and taxonomy, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that, “natural history can only think in terms of relationships (between A and B), not in terms of production (from A to x).” Yet, for Deleuze and Guattari, human-animal becoming (from human to animal, or vice versa) stands within the realm of conceptual possibility. Becoming-animal is not a metaphor or mimesis, but truly a metamorphosis. Haraway

Like the issue of race in humans, the pit bull exemplifies how much ‘dog’ and ‘breed’ have more to do with human perception and social construction than science.

gives substance to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept, as her relationship to her dog is not simply *relationship* but *production* or, as she names it, ‘transfection.’ In mentioning her dog’s infectious saliva, Haraway conjures up popular images of vampire folklore where the irresistible urge to bite, and thus turn the victim into a vampire, recalls the domino effect of rabid contamination. But instead of the common virus, what Haraway names the “irresistible” infection is contracted through a non-threatening lick-

ing tongue. Ms. Cayenne Pepper, *canis familiaris*, a pet and companion animal, offers a model of mutual ‘human-animal becoming’ that is highly desirable, a type of becoming expected from a “good” dog.

In agreement with Haraway, Harlan Weaver offers his personal account of human-animal becoming in his article “‘Becoming in Kind:’ Race, Class, Gender, and Nation in Cultures of Dog Rescues and Dog-fighting.” Weaver focuses on both the sociological and biological aspect of any sorts of becoming, be it gender or animal. The author depicts how his pit bull named Haley contributed to shaping his identity and to bringing him a sense of safety during his vulnerable time transitioning from woman to man. The pit bull was instrumental in Weaver’s gender identity transformation but Weaver argues that his vulnerable state as a person in transition (no longer identified as woman, though not yet wholly manifested as man), his race, and his social class were equally important for Hale. While pit bulls are often incorrectly perceived as inherently dangerous, Weaver feels that Haley appeared as a less dangerous dog next to his white middle-class, transitioning person. Weaver names this type of mutual becoming, ‘becoming in kind,’ a phrase that emphasizes the importance of the reliance on others in any types of identity transformation, including transitioning. ‘Kind,’ in Weaver’s understanding, ontologically refers to the type of being that one becomes in contact with another species. But in Weaver’s article, ‘kind’ could also allude to the adjective, namely the kindness of man’s best friend. In most western cultures, and particularly in a white middle-class normative context, man and dog are presented as kind and beneficial

to each other in a therapeutic bonding that involves a good amount of physical affection.

'Becoming in kind' undoubtedly plays nice, but it needs to be stressed, as Haraway and Weaver do, that Ms. Cayenne Pepper's and Haley's kindness is inscribed in a specific becoming that is meant for a special 'kind' of people. Haraway and Weaver both address the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in their writing and both situate their conjoining within a white female, middle-class, academic context. Just as Weaver's dog is meant to contract the socio-racial status of her white transgender human companion, Haraway's pet is perceived as a threat or as a loving companion based on Haraway's social and racial status, otherwise referred to as a 'human-animal infectious relationship.'

As Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy explain in *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus* (2012), in the European nineteenth century, the goodness or badness of the dog was very much determined in relation to the presence of rabies and to the fear that this contagious disease instigated in the masses. In nineteenth century Paris, for example, the overblown fear of rabies led to dog massacres. More recently, in May 2005, the hysteria around pit bulls in Denver resulted in a pit bull ordinance that initiated a mass killing of dogs. Dog phobia has shifted from the human fear of a zoonotic disease transmitted through dog bites to the fear of a specific dog breed. Pit bulls as a type are inherently perceived as "bad dogs" in need of eradication the way that rabid dogs once were. Vicki Hearne in *Bandit: Dossier of a Dangerous Dog* (2002), a book in defense of pit bulls, draws an important connection between the role of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the 1880s rabies epidemics in England and the role that the Humane Society of the United States played in the 1980s so-called pit bull epidemics. Hearne argues that, in both cases, the organizations' efforts to bring the "unexpected crisis" to the public's attention were part of a wider plan to collect funds or to seek legislative support. While the fear of rabies is based on a real disease, fear of pit bulls is predicated on more nebulous factors. As Susan McHugh points out in *Dog* (2004), because the breed of a dog is mostly determined by visual or behavioral characteristics, categorization based on breeds is an imprecise taxonomical system. But in the case of the pit bull, its biological or genetic reality is even more questionable since what is commonly known as "pit bull" is not an official breed but an umbrella term that can refer to various breeds, including the Staffordshire bull terrier, the pit bull terrier, and many kinds of bulldogs. Like the issue of race in humans, the pit bull exemplifies how much 'dog' and 'breed' have more to do with human perception and social construction than science.

Dogs were once perceived as dangerous due to rabies, but today the black man is the one responsible for making the big dog look

‘un-kind.’ In America, the perception of canine aggressiveness has metonymically shifted from a zoonotic to a racial context. In the presence of a white—preferably female—subject, the pit bull is allegedly rehabilitated and therefore appears to be safe to humans, only because the black male is the one who carries the (sublimated) rabies vector. The function of the white middle-class, and preferably female, subject is to rehabilitate the dog from its association with black men, not because black men have historically had a bad influence on the dog (the dog is hardly insignificant in the history of the black diaspora of the Americas); rather because, over the centuries, white collective consciousness in the Americas has been imposing images of ferocious dogs on black men.

The 2007 Michael Vick case is the latest installment in a long history of cyno-racial (dog-black) representations. After a raid at Michael Vick’s Virginia mansion in 2007, the federal government indicted the star quarterback from the Atlanta Falcons football team on charges related to an illegal dogfighting ring. Vick pleaded guilty to the charges after compelling evidence incriminated him. The investigation showed that Vick had taken an active role not only in financing the operation, but also in attending the fights and, more disturbing yet, in drowning, bludgeoning, or electrocuting the dogs deemed not aggressive enough for combat. The media coverage quickly developed racialized undertones, as if Vick’s blackness had to be an essential part of the story. In her article, “The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Michael Vick,” Claire Jean Kim details the reactions of Vick defenders and proponents. The defenders argued that the prosecution treated Vick unfairly because of his race, while animal rights advocates focused on the predicament of the dogs, vehemently denying that race had anything to do with the case. Kim cites one caller on NPR’s *Talk of the Nation* who said he does not care whether Michael Vick is black, white, green, or purple because to him, color is not a factor. Yet, as Kim argues, color takes part in everything. The Vick case epitomizes our modern era of micro-aggression where the existence of racism, when disavowed, penetrates even deeper into the community. As Kim says, we live in a historical period in which “race is everywhere and everywhere denied.” The manner in which the country reacted to the Vick case highlights the importance of the intersectionality of race and animal species in America. By animalizing Vick (asking for Vick to be neutered) and anthropomorphizing his dogs (suggesting that on a human-animal spectrum Vick is more of an animal than his dogs), the media engaged a three-century long habit of equating black men with animals. The public reaction to the case brought to the surface a deeply rooted tradition of conjoined racialization and animalization—from eighteenth century taxonomical discourses locating blacks closer to the ape in their phylogenetic development, to the 2008

presidential campaign where images of presidential candidate Barack Obama as Curious George the monkey surfaced.

In addition to the intersection of race and species, the Michael Vick case ultimately leads us to a better understanding of 'kindness' as a social and racial construct. In his bestseller, *The Lost Dogs: Michael Vick's Dogs and Their Tale of Rescue and Redemption* (2011), Jim Gorant depicts how volunteers and professionals rescued Vick's pit bulls after their owner was incarcerated. The rescue efforts were geared towards saving the dogs from euthanasia and repairing their bad reputation. Gorant's book is itself an attempt at salvaging the pit bull's public image. In it, Gorant includes pictures illustrating the rescue efforts. Those pictures show white workers and volunteers (many female and children) in close physical contact with endearing looking pit bulls. In one of the pictures, a group of unidentifiable blacks are walking in the direction of the camera, alongside Vick's emptied kennels. The kennels look like a canine death row at the end of which a fenced door, the door closest to the camera lens, has been left wide open.

The open door, certainly meant to evoke the very recent release of the dogs, also brings to mind the escape of a dangerous convict. Gorant's photographs attest to the inclination in America to perceive canine badness within a racial paradigm, since the only blacks featured in Gorant's series of photos are associated with the pre-rehabilitation phase and the cement urban landscape of incarceration.

This also brings to mind the 2001 Diane Whipple case in which a young blonde woman was the victim of a fatal dog attack and, as a result, the guardians of the killer dogs were indicted for second-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter. Diane Whipple was killed by two massive Perro Presa Canarios in the hallway of her apartment building. At the time of the attack, the dogs were under the care of a couple living in Whipple's building. The black male dog, named Bane, was euthanized right after the attack, since it allegedly was the one responsible for the attack. The tan female dog, Hera, whose role in the murder was uncertain, was euthanized a year later. As Carla Freccero points out in her article entitled "Figural Historiography: Dogs, Humans, and Cynanthropic Becomings," the media coverage of the Whipple case indicates that the interracial story superseded the interspecies dimension in this tragedy. The media fed, as Freccero explains, on "the 'myth of the black rapist,' at the scene of the murder, uncannily accented by

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the ultra-whiteness of Whipple in photographs and the ultra-blackness of Bane that circulated in the press.” Race is vicariously guilty of the animal misdeed in a slavery-old logic where the violence inflicted on a white woman by a black subject (in this case, a dog) is compelled to be read within a sexual paradigm, the ‘black beast’ being then both human and animal.

Identifying the attack dog with the race of the owner (Vick) or seeing physiological connections between a black murderous dog and a black rapist (Whipple) is symptomatic of the unresolved racial issues in America dating back to slavery. During slavery, bloodhounds imported from Cuba or Germany were trained to pursue escaping slaves in both the Caribbean and the American South. The white slaveholder trained the dogs to become ferocious only when in contact with blacks. Although not much is known about the early presence of dogs in the Americas, in *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (1998), Marion Schwartz explains that Columbus found small non-barking dogs used as company and occasionally as food during his trip to the Antilles. The indigenous Taínos

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called them *Aons*. Pre-Conquest *Aons* are an extinct species today, but Conquest and post-Conquest dogs are still very much part of the Americas. Large mastiffs were first imported to the Americas in order to track recalcitrant Indians, and later, during slavery, to chase runaway slaves. This type of canine importation was prevalent in the history of the Spanish, French, and English American colonies, from the conquistadors

to the slave owners. Based on what we know, it is safe to say that the large dog was imported to the Americas as a ‘mean dog’ and its role was to discipline ‘bad’ disobedient blacks.

The dog made to look threatening for the sake of the slave, also perceived as bad, is what I call interspecies ‘becoming against.’ The term ‘becoming against’ adapts Weaver’s ‘becoming in kind’ to a black diasporic context. The preposition ‘against’ polysemously takes into account the extreme closeness (standing against each other) and the belligerent nature of the physical contact, while ‘becoming’ suggests that the dog and the slave are mutually shaped by the construction of their selves as bad beings. In his fictional book, *Le vieil homme esclave et le molosse* (1997), the Martinican novelist Patrick Chamoiseau gave a poetic and philosophical rendition of the chase between the old slave fleeing the plantation and the master’s dog going after him. Chamoiseau’s manhunt resonates in the French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s famous article “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” By *following after* the slave, the dog has initiated a mutual

slave-dog becoming in which the two species *take after* each other. In the following quotation, Jacques Derrida highlights the interspecies *becoming* inherent to the polysemic genre, “Being-after-it in the sense of the hunt, training, or taming, or being-after-it in the sense of a succession or inheritance?” In this mutual ‘becoming against,’ one can no longer determine which, the dog or the slave, is made to look bad as a reaction to the other’s perceived badness. Without the old slave’s disobedience, the dog would not have needed to enact his ‘bad dog’ persona and chase him, just as without the presence of the dog on the plantation, the old slave—as Chamoiseau tells us—may not have felt the need to run away.

Moreover, it is important to note that the slave and the dog are legally bound in the history of the Americas in a way that can also explain their putative conjoined ‘viciousness.’ While, for centuries, American and British law has been unable to determine whether the dog should be deemed ‘ownable,’ the status of the slave as personal property has been subject to little legal doubt in the Americas. In the 1685 *Code noir* (French Black Code) and in the various Southern Slave Codes, the slave is understood to be *meuble* or ‘chattel,’ a movable property like a piece of furniture. Chattel is etymologically related to cattle, both suggesting the idea of capital (from the Latin *capitalis*). As Colin Dayan explains in *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (2013), there have been various legal attempts since the sixteenth century to determine the ownable nature of the dog, owing to the widely-shared assumption that the canine species is a hybrid entity, neither completely domesticated like farmed animals nor fully wild like wolves. Dayan relies on a number of cases to show that the uncategorizable status of the dog is based on the perceived tension between the dog’s trainable nature and its propensity towards viciousness. In light of this, laws asserting that slaves were fully ownable stand in jarring contrast to the slave’s equally imperfect ownable predisposition: ‘property,’ yet human. But as much as law has put the dog’s potential relapse into ferociousness at the heart of the debate over property, the slave’s status as property has only been viable if the slave’s untamable predisposition is ignored. Like a symptom, however, this disavowal was bound to resurface in what we may call the ‘Cujo Effect.’

Cujo, the title of Lewis Teague’s 1983 horror film, is the name of the St. Bernard main character who, after having been bitten by a vampire bat, develops rabies, eats its owner alive, and turns against everybody in hydrophobic madness. But Cudjoe, as Paul Youngquist is quick to remind us in his chapter “The Cujo Effect” in *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective* (2012), is also the name of one of the most celebrated Maroon leaders in the history of Jamaica, a fearless rebel boasting numerous bloody victories against the British. Cudjoe’s attacks

First "Carrie"
then "The Shining".
Now, author Stephen King unleashes
the most terrifying
fear of all...



Poster for
the film *Cujo*
(1983).

were so successful that the British rulers of the island resigned themselves to signing a Peace Treaty in 1739, granting freedom to Cudjoe and his men in return for the guarantee that the Maroons would no longer attack them or harbor new runaway slaves. The ‘Cudjoe’ and ‘Cujo’ amalgam hints at a retaliative or ‘ferocious’ propensity in the slave and the dog alike, the former being motivated by a claim to humanness and the latter by a wolfish instinct. But it seems as though the American collective consciousness retrospectively carries the burden of having ignored the slave’s natural right for retaliation in its modern way of belatedly assuming kinship between dogs and blacks. The cyno-racial assimilation is a trend that did not end with the abolition of slavery. Ironically enough, American civil rights rioters in the 1960s were subject to terrorization and attack by police dogs, just as during slavery blacks were hunted by dogs. As Paul Youngquist puts it so eloquently “bloodhounds are biological weapons deployed against an enemy whose animal ferocity justifies a response in kind.” What brings the dog, the slave, and the civil rights protestor together under the same stigma of ‘ferocity’ is their common claim for freedom, perceived ultimately as a feral claim.

Colin Dayan’s tour de force in *The Law Is a White Dog* is to have put side-by-side two legal cases that bring out a striking resonance between laws as applied to blacks and laws as applied to dogs. Both sets of laws are related to the question of (restricted) movement in America. The well-known 1896 racial case *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the 1897 dog case *Sentell v. New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad Company*, reached the Supreme Court one year apart and in both instances, Justice Henry Brown was left with the task of determining what kind of restrictions of movement should be imposed on blacks and on dogs. In *Sentell v. New Orleans*, Sentell was seeking compensation for the loss of property after an electric car negligently killed his pregnant dog that was standing on the tracks and could not move fast enough to avoid the approaching car. When the case reached the Supreme Court, Justice Brown ruled against Sentell stating that in Louisiana, there is only conditional property in dogs, meaning that the dog must be registered and wear a collar in order to be legally considered personal property (Sentell’s dog was not registered). But more importantly, Justice Brown argued that, “property in dogs is of an imperfect or qualified nature and that they stand, as it were, between animals *ferae naturae*, in which, until killed or subdued, there is no property, and domestic animals, in which the

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right of property is perfect and complete.” Because they are “more or less subject to attacks of hydrophobic madness,” Justice Brown posited, dogs are unreliable and must be monitored and restrained. For Justice Brown, there is no place for a dog on the loose since the dog is, by nature, a loose cannon. As for *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Justice Brown’s decision to withhold the constitutionality of racial segregation in public facilities under the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine also guaranteed that no blacks would be free to roam.

The 2012 Quentin Tarantino film, *Django Unchained*, can be seen as the enactment of Justice Brown’s negative fantasy, adjusted to the slavery era. The movie shows the extreme goriness resulting from a black man unchained and on the loose. “It’s a nigger on a horse,” an

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astounded man tells a woman as Django enters the city on a horse alongside the German bounty hunter, Dr. King Schultz. The town freezes at the sight of a black man openly riding a horse, not for labor on the plantation but for his free mobility. “They ain’t never seen no black man on a horse,” Django explains to Schultz who feigns surprise at having attracted so much attention. Even though it was not actually uncommon for blacks to ride horses during slavery, we can read this image of blacks on horseback as an allusion to the Maroons—

African refugees who escaped slavery and established their own settlements—and as a reference to the pervasive hysterical fear of black freedom of movement.

The movie includes a scene in which a runaway slave is torn into pieces by dogs while Django is forced to watch. The scene is only a prelude to Django’s own near fate. At the end of the movie, Django is hung upside down and barely escapes having his genitals cut off with a knife. Knives and dog fangs are both used as punitive and preventive weapons against the black’s will to violate his or her restriction of movement. As punishment, it was not uncommon in the American South and the Caribbean to mutilate runaway slaves upon their capture. The *Code noir* and Jamaican Black Code recommended cutting body parts—ears, sometimes a foot or a hand—to deter slaves from further escape attempts. Mutilation, performed by either a human or canine, was performed to remind the slave that she or he was, unlike the dog, a farmed animal. But more importantly, like a farmed animal, the slave was defined not only by his or her chattel status (property) but also by his or her edibility. When the slave runs away, the master needs to symbolically reassert his domination through a ritualized act of flesh



cutting. Jacques Derrida argues that in contrast to women, men are predominantly carnivorous in order to assert their masculine domination. This is what he names ‘carno-phallogocentrism,’ referring to the connection between carnivorism and virility. Using dogs or mutilation to punish the slave also uses a strategy of domination through a rhetoric of edibility, though here it is a racially-invested kind of ‘carno-phallogocentrism.’ Through the dog or the knife, the master enacts the symbolic act of eating the slave.

In “Le jeu le plus dangereux,” Grégoire Chamayou recounts a little known cannibalistic event that occurred in 1802 during the Saint-Domingue slave rebellion. Hundreds of bloodhounds from Cuba were sent to Saint-Domingue in view of crushing the slave revolt. General Louis de Noailles, who worked under Napoleon’s General, Rochambeau, and was on a mission to defeat Toussaint Louverture’s army, was in charge of the dogs. In a letter to Louis de Noailles, Rochambeau informed the General that no budget had been allocated to the twenty-eight dogs sent to Saint-Domingue. “You must give them negroes for

A Ride for Liberty—The Fugitive Slaves (ca. 1862). Eastman Johnson. Oil on paperboard. 55.8 × 66.4 cm. Image courtesy of Brooklyn Museum.

food,” Rochambeau told him. As fate would have it, the French soldiers lost ground against the resilient maroons and as a result, the French army lost access to their food supply. The French soldiers were forced to eat the dogs that had been previously fed with the flesh of the slaves. This historical incident brings the fantasy of edibility and blackness to its literal manifestation.

In his essay “Going to Meet the Man,” James Baldwin revisits the question of edibility and blackness within the context of the civil rights era. The essay is supposedly based on Bull Connor, the Commissioner of Public Safety responsible for the use of fire hoses and police dogs against civil rights protestors in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama. In the essay, Baldwin portrays what has been said to be a young Connor, named Jesse, witnessing the lynching of a black man in the company of his parents. Jesse’s parents seem very eager to enjoy what turns out to be also a castration scene. “The man with the knife took the nigger’s privates in his hand, one hand, still smiling, as though he were weighing them. In the cradle of the one white hand, the nigger’s privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales.” Jesse initially thought that he was going to a picnic. After the show comes to an end, Jesse’s father says, “Well, I told you, [. . .] you wasn’t never going to forget *this* picnic.” Both during slavery and the civil rights era, similar images of cannibalism were summoned: ravenous dogs, mutilation or castration, and ultimately the black body turned into meat.

Because black edibility is a fantasy that has been sublimated through the proxy use of dogs in lieu of cannibalistic humans, the idea of dogs attacking black people has become a haunting and unresolved image in the collective memory of both slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. As a result, dog fangs digging into black flesh is a recurrent image that first appeared in testimonials and then became deeply ingrained in popular culture. In his September 1, 1846 public address, the former slave Frederick Douglass alludes to the fate of some slaves at the mercy of ravenous dogs. “Sometimes,” Douglass says, “in hunting negroes, if the owners are not present to call off the dogs, the slaves are torn into pieces.” Dogs tearing unsubmitive, colonized blacks into pieces is also a recurrent image in *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552) by the sixteenth century Dominican friar and defender of the Indians, Bartolomé de Las Casas. Las Casas’ report about the inhumane treatment of Indians in the early stages of the Spanish colonization of the West Indies includes a significant number of incidents involving Native Americans thrown to dogs, torn into pieces, and eaten alive. The most distressing incident involves a mother and her infant chased by wild dogs. The mother tried to hang herself and her infant, yet “she was not in time to prevent the dogs from ripping the infant to pieces.” Some historians have questioned whether La Casas exaggerated and

even fabricated stories in his report in order to better serve the cause of the Indians. What is of value here is not the accuracy of his report but rather the repetitive and almost compulsive nature of Las Casas' stories. Dogs eating natives is a leitmotif that regularly resurfaces in his report. Historians have no doubt that dogs chasing and tearing Indians and black slaves into pieces is a true part of the history of the Americas, however, the extent of this hunting practice is unknown.

In *The Pit Bull Placebo: The Media, Myths and Politics of Canine Aggression* (2007), Karen Delise addresses the discrepancy between the documented knowledge related to incidents involving bloodhounds chasing runaway slaves and the real extent of this practice. As she says, “[. . .] how much of these images [dogs chasing slaves] was fiction and how much was based on truth was a highly contentious topic even in the era in which these incidents were reportedly taking place.” Delise uses the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), as an example. Stowe’s novel includes a famous passage about a runaway slave, Eliza, crossing the frozen Ohio River with her baby in her arms while being chased by a slave merchant and two slaves. Sam, one of the slaves, recounts the scene: “I saw her, with my own eyes, a crossin’ on the floatin’ ice. She crossed most ‘markably; it was n’t no less nor a miracle; and I saw a man help her up the ‘Hio side, and then she was lost in the dusk.” In the recounted scene, there is no mention of chasing dogs. In a preceding scene, the slave merchant did mention the possibility of using dogs to catch Eliza but quickly retracted as he realized that “the dogs might damage the gal.” The Eliza scene is redolent of Las Casas’ aforementioned depiction; both scenes draw on the extreme pathos of mothers and infants devoured by wild dogs, though in Eliza’s case the use of dogs is only a threat. As Delise explains, by 1880, for dramatic effect, all stage productions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* included a pack of ferocious looking dogs. The recurrence of the canine prop gave people the impression that Stowe’s book was filled with dogs chasing slaves when, in reality, the Eliza scene is the only incident in the book involving the *idea* of chasing dogs. There have been questions as to the inflated nature of stories about dogs devouring slaves but the question remains as to the motivation behind and the effect of those potential inflations.

Delise’s main claim in *The Pit Bull Placebo* is that the dog—from the bloodhound during slavery, to the German shepherd after WWII, and to the pit bull since the 1980s—has always been the victim of a fear

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Theater poster for Uncle Tom's Cabin (1881).
Color lithograph,
71 × 106 cm.
W.J. Morgan &
Co. Lith.

mongering ideological apparatus that fabricates ‘vicious’ breeds. Since Vicki Hearne’s *Bandit*, many have written in defense of the pit bull. But because the reputation of the dog is indissociable from the human presence accompanying it, the rehabilitation of the dog is incomplete without addressing the stigmatization of its human companion. The human and the dog compound each other’s constructed viciousness in a mutual ‘becoming against,’ the consequence of which is that the image of the vicious dog pursuing the slave has become part of a collective consciousness that compulsively recreates—and each time reignites—the association of the vicious dog with blacks. The best example of this since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is Andy Warhol’s 1964 “Race Riots” series. In 1963, the photographer Charles Moore took pictures of the German shepherd police dogs attacking black rioters in Birmingham, Alabama. Moore sold the photographs to *Life* magazine, a weekly American photojournalism magazine widely read by the white middle-class in the 1960s. The photographs were part of a larger project that also included images of children being fire-hosed by the police. Moore titled his photo essay, “They Fight a Fire that Won’t Go Out.” The *Life* issue with Moore’s riots photographs was released May 17, 1963. In the summer of the same year, for a 1964 exhibit in Paris at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Warhol made paintings of Moore’s dog photographs. Like his rendition of Marilyn Monroe’s portrait or the Campbell’s soup

cans, Warhol's paintings faithfully reproduced the original photograph but with a significant added difference in colors, tones, or hues. One painting, titled *Race Riot*, consists of four panels reproducing the same photograph showing a German shepherd tearing the trousers of a black man who is attempting to walk away. The same year, Warhol made additional paintings based on Moore's dog photographs for the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum in Hartford, Connecticut. One of those pictures presents a pixilated and more contrasted version of the photograph of two police dogs attacking a protester. The interesting fact about—as Warhol has called them—the “Race Riots” images is that, like the many renditions of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the vicious dog attacking the black person is the only image that Warhol chose to single out in Moore's multi-dimensional photo essay.

In “Warhol Paints History, or Race in America,” Anne M. Wagner makes a distinction between Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* (1962), *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), and *Race Riot*, arguing that the first two represent a system of commodification where the images of the soup or Marilyn are only referential while the latter has more depth. Marilyn and the soup symbolize something else. “Marilyn ‘means’ the entertainment industry the way a mirror in a seventeenth-century Dutch painting ‘means’ vanity,” Wagner explains. The same is true for the can of soup, its referential value ‘means’ mass consumption. Wagner argues that *Race Riot* does not follow Warhol's usual signature because the painting does not iconize pop culture with an empty and purely referential picture. Instead, the reproduction of Moore's photograph tells a real story anchored in a temporal framework and populated with real characters. For Wagner, the unique nature of *Race Riot* lies in the temporality of the original photograph (the narrative) and the topic, racism. However, what Wagner has not taken into account in her assessment of *Race Riot* is the presence of police dogs. The dog is centered in the photograph and the other actors—the black protestor and the police—are perceived only in terms of their relationship to the dog. What is being iconized in this narrative is incidentally the central position of the dog. As a result, the dog alone comes to ‘mean’ racism, no need for the actualization of the black and white men.

Likewise, artist James Drake felt the urge to literalize the allegorical nature of the dogs in his life-sized, interactive, iron sculpture in Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama. Drake's realistic sculpture, entitled

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Police and Dog Attack (1991), is composed of two walls forming a hallway, with snarling dogs jumping out of the walls on both sides. When crossing the hallway, visitors are made to relive the African American experience of Connor's dog attacks. In the sculpture, the white and black men are nowhere to be found. Drake's sculpture brings the image to a point: the dogs are the last ones standing in a narrative of racial tension between black and white men. Dogs attacking blacks haunts the American collective consciousness, as it reveals a compulsion to

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represent (in the sense of making present again) this particular image of racially-invested aggression. The dog attacking the black man is the ultimate *mise en abîme*. The iterative logic in photorealism, doubled by Warhol's repetition of the same picture (also the four panel version of the same picture in *Race Riot*), empties the subject of its content and gives it an allegorical surface similar to *Marilyn Diptych* or *Campbell's Soup Can*. In other words, one no longer

needs to see the black man next to the dog's fangs or the white man holding the leash in order to know that the attack dog *means* not only racism but also race.

In his biography of Josephine Baker, *Josephine: The Hungry Heart* (2001), Jean-Claude Baker finds a correlation between black freedom of movement and 'fierce' dog ownership. Talking about his adoptive mother, Josephine Baker, in the Paris of the mid 1920s, the author writes:

For a long time, I couldn't figure out why every black entertainer who came to Europe bought dogs. Fierce dogs, like wolves. Josephine had one so savage she had to board it in a kennel. Finally, a friend put it all together. "During slavery, blacks were hunted with dogs. In Europe, they could take a kind of revenge, they could own the same kinds of dogs that chased their ancestors." So there they were in little hotel rooms and they had these huge dogs.

James Baldwin also, in the midst of civil rights unrest, experimented with dog ownership while living in Turkey. There is no doubt that black emancipation could have resulted in a rise of any type of black ownership, including dog ownership. As Weaver explains, in the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries, dog fighting was mainly a practice from the white rural South, but in the 1980s, “there was an influx of urban men of color into breeding circles.” The 1980s saw the first black emancipated generation after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and potentially the first generation of blacks able to freely move around—coincidentally enough—in the company of dogs. That being said, unlike what Jean-Claude Baker suggests, the association of blacks and attack dogs in American collective consciousness is not based on an actual ‘revenge’ of the black race but rather on the white fantasy of black revenge. Blacks do not own ‘fierce’ dogs as retribution for slavery, but those who do own dogs are unconsciously perceived as revengeful due to the lingering fantasy of the ‘Cujo Effect.’ Blacks owning big dogs enacts Brown’s double fear: the black and the dog together on the loose, without the white master. We may dare a symbolic connection between the 2005 pit bull ordinance and black men losing their lives (Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, or Eric Garner) at the hands of policemen and self-appointed authority figures, or the perception of blacks jaywalking or roaming the streets as threatening. In his novel *Chien blanc* (1970), the French writer Romain Gary visualizes what happens when the White Southerner loses hold of both his dog and the black. In the fictional autobiographical story, Gary imagines finding a lost so-called ‘white dog,’ which is a dog from the South trained by the police to attack blacks. Gary names the dog Bakta. Eventually in the story, Bakta is taken over by a character who looks like Malcolm X and who secretly trains the dog to attack white people. The story ends with Gary being viciously bitten by what used to be a ‘white dog.’ Like Bakta, the ‘white dog’ is perceived today as no longer white, the dog has been bitten by the black and both share a rabid-induced cyno-racial kinship against which the old master seeks protection. ●